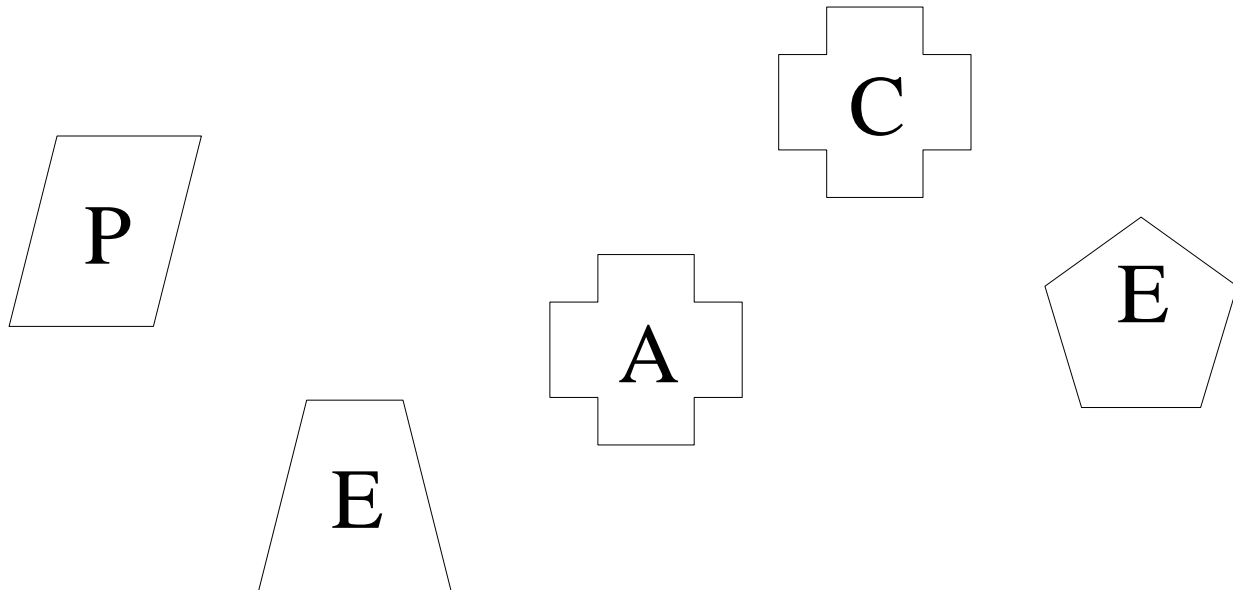


PICKING UP THE PIECES: Efforts to Achieve Community Peace and Rebuild Communities



A STRATEGIC PLAN TO ATTACK VIOLENCE

**Prepared by the Office of Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr.,
For Presentation and Adoption by the
Greater Rochester Community**

October 21, 2005

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The Rochester community has been hit hard by violence during the past two decades. In the early 1990's, pervasive violence led Mayor Thomas P. Ryan, Jr. to appoint a task force of community and neighborhood leaders to identify ways of lowering historically high homicide rates. Just prior to his retirement, in 1993, the panel issued its recommendations, entitled ***"The Will To Reduce Violence."***

Upon assuming office in 1994, Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr. took aggressive steps to implement this report. He appointed an energetic former prosecutor, Van H. White, to be the city's Violence Prevention "czar". White engaged hundreds of citizens from across the region to design and implement violence prevention strategies. The Mayor also appointed a new Chief of Police, Robert S. Warshaw, to design and implement, in conjunction with police and citizens alike, community-oriented policing strategies.

Under the leadership of these two creative, energetic and experienced law enforcement professionals, the city's homicide rate dropped from 68 in 1993 to 29 in 1999. Hundreds of citizens, heretofore uninvolved in any type of crime and violence prevention activities were engaged in PAC-TAC patrols, neighborhoods watches, marches against drugs and violence, establishing and staffing mini-police stations throughout the city, and creating and staffing more planned activities for youth. Creativity and volunteers were flowing like a rushing river across the community. Hundreds participated in Citizen-Police academies, and police-community interaction teams. Hundreds more helped to write a new City Master plan, the ***Rochester 2010 plan***, which stressed citizen involvement and community public safety as among the highest priorities.

Since 2000, the city's homicide rates have been inching back up into the 40's. 2003 was a particularly brutal year, 57 homicides....the highest number since 1997. In fact, from January 1, 2003 until the current date, there have been 141 murders, an average of 47 annually. Several of these have been the highly publicized killings of innocent children, ten(10) in number under the age of 18. With each new killing of a child, the community became increasingly incensed and clamored for justice and solutions.

Every one of these murders has a depressing effect on the community's psyche. For Mayor Johnson in particular, there is alarm and anger that so many of these victims are young African-American males. Most years, 75% or more of the victims fall in this category. These horrendous deaths amount to lost opportunities, destroyed families, and diminution of the community's impeccable reputation for being a community which highly values its quality of life for all people.

Within the past three weeks, the community has been mesmerized by the random murders of three

African American teenagers, one 16 year old female and two males, ages 14 and 15. During that same time frame, five African American males between the ages of 20 and 44 and one Hispanic male, age 46, were killed. This is inexplicable.... and completely unacceptable...carnage, reflecting a complete lack of respect for human life among a very small segment of the community.

Mayor Johnson and his staff undertook a series of meetings and listening sessions with affected and involved sectors of the community: representatives of various faith denominations; human service providers; police, prosecutorial and judicial leaders; high school students; young adults ex-offenders; the United Way; the city school district; and concerned citizens from all walks of life. Numerous concerns and suggestions were voiced.

These sessions demonstrated the complexity of the problem, as well as the myriad solutions that must be embraced. It became increasingly clear that many people were diligently trying to address the violence problem, but a sustainable comprehensive strategy had not been identified, because of fragmented and/or insufficient resources.

These sessions also uncovered several interesting perspectives, including:

- 1) people are not looking for “quick fix” solutions that will inevitably fade with time. Instead there was near unanimous belief that we must address the root causes that fuel violent behaviors;
- 2) this is not a “police” or “government” or “agency” problem, but one that requires the undivided attention of the entire community, including those sectors that have traditionally excused themselves from being a part of the solution. The various community resources must unite in synergistic collaboration to attack the problem from every conceivable angle.
- 3) the “at risk” sectors of the community, those who might be traditionally viewed as victims and perpetrators, must become active participants in the “solutions” phase. We can no longer make excuses for their shortcomings, or judge them as being incompetent to solve their own problems. We must equip them with the skills necessary to make the transition from predator and victim to productive citizens.
- 4) adults and youth have different perspectives on this problem, and adults can benefit greatly by making an effort to listen to the concerns of our youth.

As a result of these sessions, Mayor Johnson and his staff have compiled a list of recommendations that comprise the essential elements of a ***comprehensive strategy to attack and substantially reduce the violence levels across our community.***

In order for this to become ***an immediate plan of action***, an unprecedented level of cooperation and collaboration must occur. There has to be a recognition that many of the programmatic resources already exist, but they may be limited by contractual restrictions. Some resources may be poorly targeted or underfunded. There may be many human resources that have gone unidentified or unrecruited. Or there may be territorial concerns that have remained unchallenged.

There has been a terrible waste of human potential in the snuffed-out lives of children and adults. While economic conditions have forced many people to the bottom of the totem pole, we cannot tolerate the

assumption that these are “throwaway” people in our community. We must make the necessary commitment to rebuilding lives restoring hope. We must *“pick up the pieces of our broken lives”, and “restore the peace” that all vibrant and progressive communities experience.*

The City Government , through our Police Department, Pathways to Peace Program, Recreation Services, and numerous youth development and job training programs will continue to offer substantial resources in this violence reduction campaign. Our community partners will bring their considerable resources to this effort. We will immediately convene these partners, many working together for the first time, to bring unprecedented focus and urgent prioritization to the following immediate, mid-term and long-term strategies, and to develop a plan for immediate implementation.

As soon as the results of the November Mayoral election are known, the out-going and in-coming Mayors will join forces to ensure that these plans will continue without interruption. Just as Mayor Ryan handed off the recommendations of the 1993 report, so will Mayor Johnson hand over a fully developed strategic plan to his successor.

THE CORE ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

The initial steps in this implementation process will be:

Development of a **Community Asset Inventory**, of human service providers, government agencies and faith institutions with established family and youth programs, that provides accurate, timely and useful information on services available and how to access them. Since this is a critical need, this first task will be immediately undertaken by the City of Rochester utilizing the enormous amount of community work that has already been invested in this area.

There will also begin a massive effort to recruit volunteers and organizations to support the activities and efforts listed below. Mayor Johnson has been invited by Dr. Albert Simone to jointly convene a **Call To Arms Task Force**, which will develop a mechanism for recruiting thousands of volunteer mentors. Originally envisioned by Dr. Simone as a way to expose children to caring adults, it is now clear that many adults can also benefit from mentoring and coaching. Therefore, this effort will now be expanded to address all contingent circumstances.

Youth Strategies

The most critical issue that must be addressed by the community is the need for parents to step forward

and participate in the effort to ensure the well-being of their children.

- This community must set **norms, standards, expectations and requirements** for acceptable parenting and it must also set and maintain consequences for parenting behaviors and standards that are unacceptable and detrimental to the community. Parents that do not adhere to these standards and requirements must face severe consequences, and in some cases, even legal sanctions to ensure that our children are safe.
- Development and/or broader re-institution of **Marketing Campaigns** like “It’s 10 PM – Do you know where your child is?” should immediately occur to raise the awareness of parents.
- **Education and Awareness Programs**, including billboards, public service announcements, door to door outreach campaigns and radio and other media must be instituted to strongly communicate to parents their responsibility for identifying and ensuring the participation of their children in safe, structured day and night-time activities. The basic elements of this campaign are identified in the program espoused by Councilman Adam McFadden. We will continue to urge him to incorporate his efforts into this comprehensive campaign.
- Developing a **Parent Help Hotline** which provides parents with access to trained facilitators that can provide information on assistance in setting and maintaining parental curfews for youth, and exercising appropriate disciplinary control.
- The issue of guns, their easy availability and the lack of self-control evidenced by many members of this community in choosing to use guns to settle relatively minor disputes must be immediately addressed thru the **immediate expansion and enhancement of a sustainable “Get the Guns Off the Street” program**. This program must have teeth and be well-publicized. Existing successful models include the St. Louis Gun Amnesty program upon which a relatively new model, the **Rochester Youth Gun Project**, is based. The Rochester model, developed by the Rochester Police Department and the Monroe County District Attorney’s Office, will be expanded and marketed more extensively to ensure its greater effectiveness.
- To address youth alienation, this community must develop a network of **Safe Havens for Challenged Youth**. These havens should be located across the City to assure easy accessibility and provide a supportive environment where the youth can learn about and access needed services, develop relationships, and find opportunities and strategies to be productive and successful. They can be provided by agencies or faith-based institutions, but in every instance, they must be staffed by properly trained adults.
- This network of Youth Safe Havens should be supported by the development of an after-hours **Youth Transport Van Service** which works with Police Officers and Community Outreach Workers to spot youth on the street and transport them to a safe haven.
- We must restore order to the classrooms. Discussions with in-school youth indicate that this is among their highest priorities. A small number of students create such disorderly conditions and an air of intimidation that it makes learning difficult, if not impossible. We must **investigate successful models that place disruptive students in a different classroom environment that**

allows their disruptive behavior to be intensively addressed and monitored.

- We must immediately expand, replicate or re-institute successful **In-School Suspension and Alternative Education Models** that keep youth in a controlled, structured environment that provides intensive and culturally-specific services designed to increase the chance for success for youth facing extraordinary life challenges or that have unique needs or different learning styles.
- Schools should develop and/or expand **Conflict Resolution and Anger Management Programs** in the core curriculum, thus ensuring that they are embedded within the school programming and available to all students.
- Development of a **Youth Emergency Response Team is needed**. This model should be focused on the mental and emotional health needs of youth, provide a timely response to prevent injury or harm to the youth and provide cost-effective follow-up and maintenance services to the youth and family designed to link youth and families to available resources and prevent and reduce the occurrence of out-of-home or out of the community placement.
- Development of the Youth Emergency Response Team should be supported and supplemented by development of a regional network of **In-School Wellness Centers** designed to address mental health and well-being issues that unnoticed or untreated could result in physical, mental or emotional harm to the youth or someone else. We must also find a way to expand the model of school-based health services that are offered at School #17.
- We should develop a minimum of two **Residential Schools for Extremely Challenged Youth** to maintain on-site services in a controlled, structured environment. These facilities should allow for family participation in the development of the youth and provide continued case management and tracking services to families after the residential program is completed.
- We must develop **Parenting Skill Programs** that provide parents with a set of skills that can be used to address a variety of parenting challenges and problems unique to the urban environment and unique to the age, culture, living situation and educational level of the parent.
- To help youth avoid initial contact with the criminal justice system, this community must expand and develop additional **Youth Diversion Programs** to provide the Family Court with additional resources to serve the needs of troubled families and youth and to provide youth with structured community-based opportunities for rehabilitation.
- The community should immediately embrace and investigate the basic tenets of the **Children's Zone concept** that is being advocated by RCSD Superintendent, Dr. Manuel Rivera. This program is modeled after the highly-acclaimed **Harlem Children's Zone**. The vast network of human service providers should be invited to work closely with Dr. Rivera to identify an appropriate framework and operating structure for implementing this program.
- This community needs to implement a **Marketing Campaign Targeted at Predatory Men, Young Females And Families**. This campaign should make young women understand that they have other options for escaping the disadvantages of their life and should also focus on making men aware of the criminal penalties associated with statutory rape. This marketing effort should also be coupled with and followed up by the **Aggressive Enforcement of Statutory Rape Laws**

that currently exist in New York State.

Adult Strategies

- To address the un- and under-employment issue which is an underlying cause of much of the violence, this community must look to **smaller companies and other segments of the community to participate in this effort and specifically work to identify and develop private sector job opportunities for African -American and Latino men who are traditionally left out of the employment market.**
- We must develop additional **programs that provide job readiness training and on the job training opportunities** which allow individuals to can gain the skills they need to succeed on the job while earning an income.
- This community must also work diligently to ensure that **men living in urban areas with less barriers to employment are provided access to good-paying jobs in the Construction Industry through Targeted Employment and Outreach Efforts as well as the creation of opportunities for these individuals in the skilled-trades industry.**
- **Life Skills and Employment Readiness Programs for Severely At-Risk Young Males are needed in great numbers.** The City has begun efforts in this area and will work to encourage other organizations throughout the community to target similar programs to this population.
- It is also extremely important that the business community champions these efforts. We will need to engage **organizations like the RUMP Group, the Rochester Business Alliance and the Greater Rochester Enterprise in this effort and ask them to develop the strategies and outreach that will lead to the development of a specific number of permanent jobs. In the immediate term, we believe a minimum of 500 jobs can be recruited into this effort.** These business groups must be encouraged to identify the mentoring, coaching and supportive services tools that will lead to long term employment for the target group.
- **New York State and the Rochester-Monroe County Workforce Investment Board will also be called upon to redirect training funds to support this effort and expand services such as those provided by the BEST program.**
- **The broader community**, including individuals, faith-based organizations and existing businesses **will also be asked for assistance identifying and creating micro-enterprises, entrepreneurial opportunities and other legitimate income-generating initiatives that will help to develop the untapped skills, talents and abilities of men living in our neighborhoods..**

- This community must develop a **Program to Address the Early Stages of Escalating Violence** in aggravated assault cases and identify persons at risk and persons with a propensity for future or more extreme violence.
- We must implement an **Education and Awareness Campaign to Educate Adults** in this community about the music and other media embraced by their children. We must be aware of the lifestyles espoused by various artists and make sure that our youth know that these lifestyles may not be viable or realistic options for them.
- To reduce the number of illegal guns carried by adults, we must immediately **Strengthen and add creative Marketing and Publicity Components to Project Exile.** New components should be added including a media campaign to include billboards, television and radio ads to fully communicate to the community what happens to young people and adults when they are caught with an illegal weapon.
- Greater efforts must be undertaken to educate and make urban and suburban parents aware of the negative behaviors of their children and the connection between suburban drug use and the city's violence issue. **We must aggressively target individuals that persist in coming into our community to purchase illegal substances thru the use of sting operations and other dis-incentives.**
- Parolees and men on probation must be provided services to successfully re-enter society. **Existing programs that provide support to men exiting the penal system and provide them with mentoring support, access to job-training and other re-acclimation services should be immediately expanded and new programs developed to help this population..**
- To ensure that men are a vital part of this effort, **the City of Rochester will work with Councilman Adam McFadden to implement the "Thou Shalt Not Kill" campaign through the launch of a full-scale media campaign that utilizes billboards, posters, radio/tv psa's and other media.** This campaign can be especially effective by recruiting men and women volunteers who have the unique talents and abilities to relate to young people on their own turfs, and in their own language.

As we commence the processes of asset inventories and strategy prioritization, the question of financial resources must be addressed. Some new funds may be required, and it will be important to lobby government, foundations and the private sector to raise them. We should not shirk from that course, if it is what is necessary to reduce the level of intolerable violence that elicits our outrage.